

To Museum

MEMORIES OF LUMBERING

- by Jack Huffman, Sr.

My first memories of logging was to see logs being rafted and floated down the Guandotte River in Lincoln County, West Virginia probably about 1903. At that time the logs were floated down near Huntington, West Virginia. Only the best of Yellow Poplar and White Oak were taken. The logs would be hauled to the river by Oxen & Horses. Where the timber was a long way from the river a tram road would be built, wooden rails.

About 1904 a railroad was built up the Guandotte river. This opened up coal fields in Logan County and brought small saw mills into Lincoln County.

The first sawmill I ever saw was a small mill at Lest, West Virginia and my father tramroaded logs to it. About 1906 a small band mill was built about a mile from Lest, West Virginia. A railroad was built from Gill, West Virginia, about 6 miles to the mill and then into the lumber woods. My father and uncle got a job on this train and uncle got killed on the log train. Father took a contract to cut logs for a small mill at \$1.00 per M and we moved up to the mill. At this mill I wheeled sawdust $\frac{1}{2}$ day and got paid 25 cents. I was 10 years old. Mother would not let me work.

About 1908 we moved from Lincoln County to Greenbrier County, West Virginia at Anthony, West Virginia. Father thought he had a contract piling lumber but when he arrived they wanted him to work on the log train. He worked on the train about two months and then we moved to

Woodman, West Virginia, about 3 miles above Anthony. Father piled lumber from a small band mill and got \$1.75 per day. We lived along the railroad and lumber yard in a nice house. I trucked our fire wood from the mill down the docks and carried it to the house. My uncle, Addison Huffman, worked on the log train and lived at camp about four miles away.

In the early fall of 1908 we moved to Watoga, Pocahontas County, West Virginia where father got a job pileing lumber at \$2.00 per day for ten hours. This was a band mill. We moved into a house near the school house and in the summer of 1909 I carried water on the yard and mill for 50 cents for 10 hours. In 1910 I carried water on the mill for 50 cents per day and Bill Hoover carried on the yard. In this year a lumber inspector taught me how to tally lumber, on rainy days while loading it in cars. I liked this and would help him whenever I could. I was in the 5th reader in school. In 1911 the mill shut down and I worked a while in the kindling wood factory. That shut down.

In 1912 our 5 months school was out about February 22nd, Washington's birthday. This was my last schooling.

In early spring father got a job piling lumber for the Warren Lumber Company, at their double band mill, up from Seebert, West Virginia about a mile. I got a job picking out slabwood and helping the fireman at \$1.25 per day for 11 hrs. We walked from Watoga to the mill about 2 miles for a while, then moved into a house next to the church. After a while I started to run the slasher in the mill at \$1.75 per 11 hours. This job was most to hard for me but I stuck it out until late fall when father and all the other pilers got fired. Father then got a job pileing

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lumber for F. P. Kidd at Locust, West Virginia and in the fall of 1912 we moved there near the mill. I got a job helping the fireman, oiling and cleaning up under the mill and filling and lighting the gasoline lights in the mill, I got \$1.25 per day of 10 hrs. Sometimes when the mill was down I would tally lumber when being loaded in cars, and in the store on days when the mill was not running. Mr. Kidd was a fine man, he lived on a farm at Hillsboro, West Virginia.

In the spring of 1913 the Flynn Lumber Company opened up operations at Spice Run, West Virginia and Father was their 2nd employee and I was their 3rd. My first assignment was putting in grade stakes for a double end switch off the C & O Railroad.

This C & O Railroad run from Roncevert, West Virginia to Winterburn, a distance of 104 miles up the Greenbrier River and Spice Run was 38 Miles from Roncevert.

As soon as possible, within a month, yellow pine lumber was received and the building of about 25 houses was started. On these Father worked as a carpenter at \$2.50 per day and I as carpenters helper at \$1.25 per day. The houses were all largely the same style, 4 room cottages built upon posts, without cellars, a frame with sideing and double beaded ceilings. We moved into the 4th house done.

The mill was brought from Willdell, West Virginia, the framework was all marked and it was rebuilt without new lumber. I did not help build the mill except I went inside the boilers and cleaned them.

To start with, Spice Run had only two farm houses and a small building used as Post Office and store. One of these farm buildings was used

as a boarding house for the men.

An 8 room cottage was built for Mack & Gus Flynn and three 6 room cottages were built for the foremen. A school was built on the hill above town and this was used for Church and Sunday School.

Mack & Gus Flynn and their father owned the Company. Mr. Hinkle was Mill foreman and F. D. Snyder was the yard foreman.

In the spring of 1914 the first car of lumber was loaded and I packed it into the car. My job at this time was to do anything that needed being done. We were still working on houses, building lumber docks and pile bottoms, working in lath and stave mill and tallying lumber in the mill after it was grade marked, wages still \$1.25 for 10 hours. A scrip money was used at the store and since my folks were always in debt I do not ever remember getting a pay day.

In 1914 my job settled to tallying lumber after it was grade marked in the mill. This was an excellent way for me to learn too grade lumber because every grade and every species of wood had to be kept separate. I worked at this for about 7 months without knowing Mr. Hinkle was my foreman, (I did not like him) I found this out when I wanted to go hunting and he refused to let me go, I went anyhow. When I returned he fired me and I was pleased because I knew where I could get 50¢ more per day for the same work. However, Mr. Flynn and Mr. Snyder gave me a raise to \$1.75 per day and I went back on the lumber yard. From this time on I was the extra lumber inspector and when not running a crew I packed lumber in cars.

In the fall of 1916 the mill shut down, business was poor, yard was full, and the Company was in financial difficulty. I could have had some

work but being single I felt married men should come before me, therefore, about December 1, 1916 Bill Hoover and I started out to find work. We were lucky, our first stop was Deer Creek, West Virginia.

On December 1, 1916 I started to work for Range Lumber Company, Deer Creek, West Virginia. Mr. Elmer Steitzinger was General Manager and his brother, Clyde Steitzinger, was yard foreman. I started as lumber inspector on the yard at \$2.25 per day for 10 hours. I boarded at the boarding house run by Mr. & Mrs. John Bennett and family. I paid 60¢ per day for board. The weather this winter was cold and my job the coldest.

About March 1, 1917 I was offered a job at Raywood, West Virginia marking lumber in the mill at much higher wages. I took it but after two days I knew the job was too much for me. This was a double band mill cutting from 75,000 to 100,000 per day and all the grade marks used was new to me so I had to quit. I went to Olive, West Virginia as yard inspector for about a month while their regular inspector was sick, my wages was \$3.00 per day. When this job was done in April I went home to Spice Run.

I was home only a few days when I had a letter from Mr. Steitzinger wanting me to come back to Deer Creek and promised to pay \$3.00 per day. Therefore, in April 1917 I returned to Deer Creek, West Virginia and worked there until March 7, 1918 then I quit and joined the Army in World War I. During all this time my folks needed money so badly that I never could wait until payday but drew an order the first of the month for all my previous months pay and after keeping out a minimum for Church and washings I sent the balance home.

During the summer of 1917 I started keeping company with the finest girl in the world, Edith Bennett. We were engaged to be married during the winter of 1918, at a later date, because her Mother preferred she wait until she was 21 years of age.

On March 5, 1918 I left Deer Creek and stopped at home. On the 7th I signed my first papers as a Volunteer in the U. S. Army, Spruce Productive Division for service in state of Washington. However, when signing some papers in Washington, D. C. I decided to join the 20th Engineers AEF.

On March 7, 1918 I arrived at Camp American University, this being training center for the 20th Engineers Forestry, U. S. Army. This outfit was largely experienced lumbermen and their duties were to take sawmills to France and supply the Allied Armies with building materials for bridges, Railroad Ties, road plank, trench timbers and boards and lumber for building army camps, warehouses etc.

In May, when my Company "E" left for France, I was in Walter Reed Hospital with the Mumps. I got back to Company "E" at Chenonceaux, France in June 1918. The mill was about ready to saw. In July I tallied the 1st car of lumber we shipped from the mill.

Our mill was a 72" circular mill with a top saw. We had an edger and a swing out saw for trimming lumber and a swing cut off saw for slabs and timbers. Also, later put in a R.R. tie mill for 8' logs. We had two boilers total 160 H.P., first we burned slabs and later changed to burn sawdust.

Our logs were trucked about 5 miles to the mill. We used 7½ ton

back trucks with solid tires and they hauled 3 iron wheel log trucks each. The haul was mostly down grade over good gravel road. Our mill cut an average of 66,000 M ft. each 24 hours in lumber. We cut logs from a cultivated White Oak Forest, the finest quality timber I ever saw. Each tree of sawing size was numbered and each tree had been inspected so that we could cut only trees designated for cutting. After cutting the logs from the tree, it was then cut into firewood for army camps so that nothing was wasted. We had 150 negro soldiers for to do this. The mill and yard workers lived at the mill, the men working in the woods had their camp there.

At our mill camp we had our cook and mess hall, office and bath house built of lumber but we lived in 12' square squad tents, we had these floored and built up 4' high on the sides. We made our own bunk beds from poles and wired the bottom poles together and filled our straw ticks with straw. Each tent had a funnel stove in a sand box.

We were in full operation on November 11, 1918 when the Armistice was signed. At 11:00 AM we tied the whistle down for 5 minutes to celebrate "FINA LE GARE" with the French People. At this time log cutting in the woods was stopped but we continued at the mill until all the logs were sawed. By the last of January all our lumber was shipped, most of the lumber at last went to Engineers Supply Depot at GEIVES, on the American front. GEIVES, was our largest Army Supply depot. In May our mill was taken down and shipped by a Frenchman to AFRICA. Our chief mill right divorced his American wife and married a French girl

and decided we would wait on getting married until I could earn money and take a Business College Course.

During 1920 I took a course in Arithmetic from International Correspondence School and studied 2 hours each day in addition to working 11 hrs. a day. My crew loaded all the heavy lumber and mostly 2 cars per day.

In August 1920 Mr. Snyder left the Company and took a job as Supt. for Captain Powell at Neola, West Virginia and I went with him as Assistant Supt. at a salary of \$150.00 per month. We had 7 circular saw mills running under contract to deliver the lumber to the railroad, owned by the company, I stayed with until December 10, 1920 at which time I quit and went to Richmond, Virginia and entered Massey Business College. I did not get to see Edith because I did not have enough money. I worked hard and got my Diploma on June 25, 1921. I Borrowed \$50.00 from Mrs. Briggs, on a note, and had only \$10.00 left when I got home.

On June 28, 1921 I found the saw mills shut down because of poor business so I got a job as bookkeeper for the Pocahontas Tanning Co., Durbin, West Virginia at \$125.00 per month.

I soon came to the conclusions that lumbering and not office work was my best bet.

About December 20, 1921 I was offered a job by W.C.Harter Lbr. Co., New York City to go to Tennessee to look after lumber for him at \$150.00 per month. I talked with over with Mr. Goodsell, Mgr. and agreed to stay until we could find a man to take my job.

The latter part of January 1922 I left Durbin, West Virginia and went to see Edith at Wyalusing, Pa. I stayed there about a week and then went to N. Y. City and stayed a week and after getting the details of my job I

went to Collingwood, Tenn. There I took charge of about 3 million feet of high grade lumber on which had been paid 80% of its value when cut and piled. I found things in a real mess. I inspected and shipped this lumber as orders came in and also traveled to other mills and accepted and shipped lumber for export. We also bought and shipped other lumber.

On August 12, 1922 I left Collinwood and picked up Rev. Frank D. Swanson at Centralia, Ky. and we proceeded to Wyalusing, Pa., arriving at 1:50 PM and was met by Edith and her father. Edith and I were married on August 14, 1922 by Rev. Swanson, our old friend. We were married at home and only relatives and Rev. and Wesley Swanson were present. We had a good time. Edith and I left a week later and went by way of Washington, D. C. where we stayed all night and one day, we stayed at the Willard Hotel.

I had been sending Edith some money and we had \$250.00 in the bank at Wyalusing (later we paid this on a note to relieve Leon and my Father). We had less than \$150.00 which we ever actually used.

I had been boarding with Mr. & Mrs. Cole and Edith and I had my old room until November 2, 1922 when we rented a 4 room cottage and bought from Montgomery Ward & Co. our household goods which cost us about \$250.00. Mr. Harter gave me a raise to \$175.00 per month. We lived here when Charles was born on June 15, 1923 and until that fall when I finished the job and we moved to Normap Tenn.

In the fall of 1923 Mr. Harter, who was president of New River Lumber Co., a subsidiary of Globe Werneka Co., Cincinnati, Ohio, wanted me to go to Normap Tenn. to inspect high grade and export lumber, however, when I

arrived I found the yard formen had left and I was to be yard foreman. This was a band mill with 3 carriages and band saws. I had five inspectors on the yard. We cut some of the finest Oak and Poplar that I ever saw. We lived in a row of houses called foremans row, had a large house and paid \$10.00 per month rent. One Supt. and four yard foremans had quit within a year. All the help was native Kentucky and Tennessee Mountainers. For the 1st 3 weeks I just let things ride and then I fired one third of the crew. After that I had a loyal crew willing to do any thing for me. My salary was \$175.00 per month, the same as the other foreman and head bookkeeper and the assistant Supt. Mr. Tim Peters. But in addition to this I received \$50.00 extra from head office. Mr. Ralph Martin was Supt.

We got along good here and save $\frac{1}{2}$ of my salary every month.

We lived here until September 10, 1925. Jack, Jr. was born here February 14, 1925.

The mill had timber for less than a years run, therefore, I began to look around for another job. I wrote the Central Penn Lumber Company at Williamsport, Pa. I got a reply wanting me to meet R. G. Brownell at Chicago, Ill. I went there and he wanted me to go to Rib Lake, Wis. I went up there but decided I did not want the job as yard foreman. This was in July, 1925. On Sept. 1st I received a telegram wanting to know if I would come to Penn. I wired that I would at a salary of \$250.00 per month. On Sept. 10th 1925 I was told to ship my goods to Masten, Pa. On Sept. 15th when I reported for duty I found they had diverted my goods to Sheffield. I was made yard Supt. of both mills that had just started

operating on day and night shift. Both mills cut about 500,000 feet each 24 hrs. In the summer of 1926 our shipments run around 1,000,000 feet per day, this meant we shipped around 40 cars per day. I found on arrival that the crew was disorganized, the grades badly mixed, and the Hemlock docks so piled with lumber that it was hard to get up and down the docks. Also found Supt. Colegrove resented my being there and the head bookkeeper wanting my job. On the Hardwood yard, Chris Newburg was foreman and was a good man. On the Hemlock yard, Earl Jefferson was foreman and had more than he could do. R. G. Brownell, Pres., A. W. Mallison was 1st vice Pres. and Hemlock Sales Mgr, O. A. Shirey, was Hardwood Sales Mgr. From the first I got along fine with the Sales Managers. The Manufacturing end wanted a higher percentage of #1 grade. I refused to put #2 in #1 piles just to raise the percentages of #1 and then have to lay it out when we shipped.

Finally I chose 4 good men and put two on each shift, this procedure was resented by Supt. Colegrove, however, it was entirely my job and he had no say. I stayed with these men almost day and night until they were trained. We got the grades in good shape but the percentage of #1 did not satisfy the manufacturing officials. Finally the matter came to a head. The sales department was convinced the grade was all right. The manufacturing end told me to keep it that way. The next day Vice President Sicelly, Mfg. end told me that I had to get more #1 Hemlock. I was ready to quit and wrote a letter to Mr. Mallison and sent a copy to all officials and told them my graders could make the grade as they wanted it but right now so told me one thing and others told me something different, therefore, I found it impossible to satisfy them all. The next day they all came to

the mill and I took them out on the yard and showed them that if the mill used more time and care that it would be possible to raise the #1 grade but that was the responsibility of Supt. Colegrove, that we had to grade lumber as it came past the trimmers. That at times our markers asked that a piece be trimmed to raise the grade and it was not done.

At the end of that conference it was decided that it would be a part of my job to instruct the sawyers, edgermen and trimmermen on turning edging and trimming to get a better grade and if they did not cooperate I was to tell the mill Supt. and if this did not get results I was to notify the main office. From that time on things went much better for me.

In March 1929 I was transferred to Masten as Superintendant. My first job was to take inventory of the Co. personal property (supplies & repair parts) these I found to be \$35,000.00 short.

Oscar Dalton was the Bookkeeper, Jasper Robbins was mill foreman, Charles Baker was yard foreman, Leon Smith Shop Foreman, George Walker Woods Supt., Thomas Trent sawyer. These were all good men and stayed until the logs were sawed.

In May, June and July we run the mill night and day to get hardwood logs cut.

Our mill sawed the last log in November 1930. During the year 1930 the mill made its record monthly cuts in Hardwood and in Hemlock.

My Salary was \$275.00 per month with house at \$6.00 per month and wood and lights furnished. We save about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the salary. Common labor was 35¢ per hour.

On February 15, 1931 I went on the road as salesman but retained my title as Supt. until July 1, 1931 at which time we moved to Olean, New York. My territory as salesman took in all points West of Utica, Norwich and Rome, N. Y. and the Northern Tier Counties of Penna. West of Towanda and down the Ohio line as far as New Castle, Pa.

Business in lumber and building was bad in 1931 to 1935 and I traveled in my work about 1,000 miles a week. I was able to build up business in my territory by catering to the smaller yards and factories.

Competition was hardest in West Coast Hemlock and Fir which was shipped green from the mill via boat through the Panama Canal to Baltimore, Md., New York City, Philadelphia and Pookepsie, N. Y. at a price average \$2.00 to \$4.00 per M' below ours and we got down to an average price of \$29.00 per M' (2x4 to 2x12 #1) delivered by railroad into my territory. Southern yellow pine sold delivered Buffalo, N. Y. for as low as \$17.50 for 1 x 6" roofers dried #2 and better with #2 and better 2 x 4 to 2 x 10 all lengths at \$23.50 per M'.

When the Federal Government passed the N.R.A. laws fixing minimum prices it helped by stabalizing and raising prices.

During 1935 to 1938 prices rose and business gradually got better. Most of this time I was working on commission but I worked hard and made good money. We saved about 40% of what I made as a salesman after payin all expenses. I quit the C.P.L. Co. on October 25, 1937.

In December 1935 we bought the farm at R.D.2, Canton, Pa. and paid \$5,200.00 cash for it, we moved on the farm on January 3, 1936. I ran the farm from November 1937 until February 1, 1941.

February 1, 1941 I started work for the Briggs - DuBoise Forest Products Co. at DuBoise, Pa. with the understanding I would stay at least 1 year. A Mill was under construction at DuBoise, Pa. when I got there. Mr. Briggs had bought a new 6' band mill, carriage, edger and 2 saw trimmer. The balance of the material for building the mill had to be picked up from "junk" or 2nd hand machinery places. The 2 boilers (18' Keeler 72 flue) came from a tile plant, etc.

A Bowling Alley pin mill was built in connection with the saw mill. All the machinery in this mill was leased from Brunswick Balk Collender Co., who bought all the pins. The pin mill started a month before the saw mill was ready.

I largely looked after getting supplies to build the mill which we started in July 1941, I bought some timber and sold all the lumber from start of production until on February 5, 1942 when my year was up and I had decided to quit because Mr. Briggs and I could not see alike on keeping records and I felt the Company was not getting a proper deal from other interests. Also, things were not going good on the farm. We were making money on the milk but I felt we were carrying other interests and I knew Briggs was selling our invoices for lumber for a discount. I began to feel that sooner or later the Company would get into financial difficulty and a year or less later it did.

We moved to DuBoise about August 1941 and left ^{March}~~February~~ 10, 1942.

The Company ran a boarding house and at one time Edith cooked for the men for a month.

I traveled quite a bit in my selling efforts. However, I was not

away more than 3 days at a time. We sold a great deal of our lumber to the Army Depot at Warren, Ohio and our #2 Beech - Birch and Maple to the Navy - who, by the way, made us reserve it for them, but at the close of the war cancelled their order.

My salary was \$325.00 per month with traveling expenses and free meals if I wanted to eat at the boarding house. The Company tried to get me to stay and offered me more money, as much as it would be necessary for me to stay but I refused.

That closed my experience in the LUMBER business.

Jack Huffman, Sr.

Written while a patient in the Veterans Hospital, Wilkes Barre, Pa.
Fall of 1963.

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